

Creative Technique

For Artists in General
and Pianists in Particular

GEORGE WOODHOUSE

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For Artists in General
and Pianists in Particular

BY

GEORGE WOODHOUSE

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FOREWORD

I have chosen the title *Creative Technique*, to define that quality of performance in which music is temperamentally interpreted, and to distinguish it from that more familiar form in which the creative faculties are dormant or lacking.

For obvious reasons, factors which create diversity of style find no place in systems which reduce technique to a method. In thus prescribing for the many, such systems in reality prescribe for none, at least they can never wholly fulfil the needs of the artist. It is not my wish on this account to prejudice the modern scientific approach to technique. Present-day pedagogy owes much to the pioneers of this method, but no system is perfect and no position final.

While this work is not intended as an indictment of the trend of modern teaching (for whatever the authority of our training, we are bound ultimately to accept the scientific principle), it is entirely another matter to accept as final a formula of touch, however derived, which excludes the vital factors of temperament and individuality. For this reason I am opposed to that complacent attitude (especially prevalent to-day) which is content with the inherent limitations of such a position.

It will be shewn that much of the new theorising which is paraded as science, is far from the mark. But criticism is not my main object, my purpose being to direct attention to a factor in musical interpretation which, because of its nature, and possibly the difficulty of dealing with a matter as elusive as it is vital, receives little serious attention.

The subject of technique appears to be especially provocative of controversy. Even in the works of those who approach it objectively, polemics play a big part. Theories are invariably established after the positions of an older school have been unmercifully demolished ; the destruction is mostly imaginary, the only part which really crumbles is that which is inherently bad (too often the exaggerations of over-zealous disciples) against which time would prove equally effective.

I have no illusions therefore about the creeds and principles which I criticise ; what is good will stand. At the same time it requires no special gift of observation to discern a new orientation of ideals, even in methods of modern pianoforte teaching. It is for instance, at last being recognised that the principle of weight-touch (current method) requires a foundation of finger and wrist technique (old school) if

pianoforte training is to be complete and enduring. On the other hand an understanding of the natural correlation of finger, wrist and arm movements (Steinhausen) the rhythmic weight principle in pianoforte technique (Breithaupt) and the act of touch itself (Matthay) often solves difficulties which students may encounter after years of isolated finger, wrist and arm work.

In actual practice, of course, these principles have always been recognised by the artist. Chopin taught a "wavelike" motion of the forearm in arpeggios ; and Leschetizky, whose method was acquired from his master, Czerny, made much of the principle of side-to-side wrist and arm movements, from which the prevalent (often-exaggerated) rotary arm-action is derived.

But the question of touch is not merely one of facility. Temperament imposes other factors. The human mechanism when directed by a creative impulse cannot finally be considered merely as a machine. On this point artist pedagogues are unanimous.

G.W.

London, 1921.

CREATIVE TECHNIQUE

THE EVOLUTION OF PIANOFORTE TECHNIQUE

There is nothing so effective as history to correct mental focus and shew the present in its true perspective. A cursory glance at the history of pianoforte technique will help us to trace the origin of the new teaching and also to understand its character. Those who read progress in every new movement, and especially in the particular one that claims their enthusiasm, will not always find it easy to reconcile their beliefs with facts.

There can be no line of continuous development. The modern child does not stand on the shoulders of the past generation of executants; he must begin with a child's understanding and weak fingers.

The pioneers of the new teaching are convinced that they have lifted pianoforte pedagogy out of the superstitious age into an enlightened twentieth century. Indeed, one inveterate optimist rejoiced

in the belief that after two hundred years in the wilderness a rationale of touch had at last been evolved !

Two hundred years ago, musicians played five-part fugues. We know this because in those days composers were often great executants and performed their own compositions.

Technique considered as mere dexterity-mechanism probably attained its maximum development in the virtuoso-schools of Thalberg and his contemporaries. But, fortunately, though there is a limit to this kind of development, pianoforte technique has not been at a stand-still ; it has moved with the trend of musical composition. The great composer leaves his mark on a generation of performers ; each new idiom finds its interpreter, and in that interpretation something new in the quality and character of touch and technique is originated.

The evolution of pianoforte playing consequently moves on parallel lines with that of musical composition. We shall trace it in vain if we proceed to a study of the text books of Couperin and C. P. E. Bach down to present day authorities. When this is realised it is only necessary to recall the succession of composers, and the Schools which the interpretation of their music created, to complete this review.

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With the passing of the harpsichord, the simple music of the early tone-pattern forms quickly developed into the sturdier contrapuntal art of Purcell and Handel. Bach completed its development, and his fugues require for their clear part-playing the maximum of finger independence and strength. Further advancement incurring greater complexity would have exceeded the technical capacity of the pianist. Bach and likewise his successors had therefore of necessity to originate other forms, and a transition was made from the strict contrapuntal art of the Fugue, through the quasi-contrapuntal dance forms of the Partita and Suite, to those which compose the Sonata.

In its early stages, the Sonata did not make great technical or interpretative demands, as for instance in the works of Haydn and Mozart, although none should essay to interpret the masters of the 18th century who has not the requisite sense of form, and technical command over delicate nuances of tone and rhythm. The compositions of Scarlatti, Rameau, Couperin and other composers of the prolific Italian and French schools of this period, provide ample evidence of the finished artistry characteristic of the playing of that day and towards which its pedagogy was directed.

With the arrival of Beethoven we are confronted with the second great vitalizing force in music. As with Bach and the contrapuntal art, history repeated itself with Beethoven and the Sonata form. The Hammerclavier Sonata, the Emperor Concerto, and Ninth Symphony mark the extent of human aspiration and achievement in the evolution of this form, and we are again confronted with that limit of complexity which ultimately bars the way to advancement, change and not continuity being the law of evolution in Art.

Few composers have influenced pianoforte pedagogy as did Beethoven. His pupil, Czerny, composed thousands of studies to meet the new demands of technique, and Schools set to work vigorously to attain the requisite means of interpretation. But though many aspired, only few attained the heights, spiritual as well as technical, necessary to expound this great music. It will live through many centuries yet, but it may be doubted if another generation will produce such interpreters as Rubinstein and Von Bülow or such pedagogues as Moscheles and Reinecke, who so completely realized the ideal interpretation of Beethoven.

Chopin provides the third and last great master of a school of pianoforte playing. It

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might be said that he is the founder of modern technique. Essentially the pianist's composer, he discovered the soul of the instrument in a form which does not permit of its expression through any other medium without losing its poetic quality. The great Polish composer was never wholly comprehended by the German Schools ; his genius and message appealed more to Paris and Vienna, and most of all to his own compatriots.

The romantic Schools of Schumann, Liszt and Brahms extended the range of pianoforte technique and interpretation in other important directions. At the same time the development of the modern piano with its sensitive and finely balanced mechanism and greater dynamic possibilities aided the expression of a personal and intimate quality in playing. The full, singing quality of tone was cultivated, and a new breadth of style developed.

The Romanticists found their interpreters in Liszt, Rubinstein, Clara Schumann and Leschetizky. The modern virtuoso-artist too is a product of their Schools, those of Liszt and Leschetizky especially being remarkable for their vital and brilliant quality of touch.

In France new paths have been traversed, and it would seem that the modern French school

came into being not by evolutionary, but rather by revolutionary processes. It would indeed be difficult to trace the origin of the musical idioms of modern French masters in the works of their great predecessors Gluck, Grétry and Rameau ; and if this applies to the form it is even more true of the content.

In its earlier period French music had a more universal note, and Bach owed much to its influence. To-day republican France has become more intensely national, and this spirit has reacted against the German romanticists.

This reaction, led by Debussy and Ravel, has created an equally distinct phase in the art of pianoforte playing. The emotional note has given place to a more subtly sensuous appeal. Its quality is often strange and fantastic, and is expressed with a fine sense of imagery and beauty. Its interpretation does not demand the fullness of tone characteristic of the German Schools. The idiom of Ravel, especially, is attenuated in texture. His tone-pictures are musical etchings, and require a fibre of touch which only a strong and sensitive finger can feel. Another characteristic of this modern school lies in the orchestration of tone-masses in which pedalling becomes a new art. The French piano is its best medium.

EVOLUTION OF PIANO TECHNIQUE II

Intermingled with the modern musical renaissance (in which British composers actively participate) are lesser cults which aim apparently to break through all concepts of form, and to give unbridled licence to imagination. It is impossible to resist the impression that this craze for daring novelty and bizarre effects is being achieved at the expense of sincerity. The inspiration of these anarchic composers seems to be largely drawn from the contemplation of the grotesque and absurd. Might it be intended as musical caricature? Except for the difficulty of reading, this music makes little demand on the player; it can generally be played with wrist and arm, and interpretation only requires a freakish imagination.

We must possibly turn to Russia to discover the main trend of musical development,¹ and in Scriabin pianists are again fortunate in the possession of a composer of the first magnitude. Original and iconoclastic, he has created music, not of one country but of a new generation, expressed with an ecstasy which is Wagnerian in intensity. Chopin and Liszt influenced his earlier works, but the maturer Scriabin is more a compound of Wagner and Beethoven. His ten Sonatas will

¹Musical development in Germany during recent years is unknown to the author at the present time.

form part of the classic pianoforte literature of the 20th century, and Scriabin, in his turn, will create a new school of technique and interpretation.

Now the extraordinary fact is, that although there has been no reaction in music (if we except the ultra-modern school), there has been a reversion in the character and spirit of much modern pianoforte teaching. This presents a curious psychological problem, but one that admits of explanation.

In Germany and Austria in the 19th century, the romantic note was intensely felt, and they became the centres of European musical culture. Beethoven's spirit had infected musical life everywhere, and the cults of Weber, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt intensified that feeling. Wagner's influence was its consummation.

It is not surprising that the schools, which aimed at the recreation of this spirit, transcended the limitations of their medium, and aimed at effects beyond the capacity of the piano.

A reaction was inevitable. The reformer appealed to science, and a wave of rationalism, which threatened to annihilate inherited beliefs, swept over the minds of theorists and created a revolution in pianoforte teaching. A superficial

analysis of the subtle and complex mechanism of the sense of touch, led to conclusions on which new Schools sprang up with astonishing rapidity. Old traditions were contemptuously denounced, and (in the light of pseudo-science) the romance with which the subject was formerly imbued vanished like mist before the morning sun.

The most expressive qualities, the sensitive, warm and passionate feeling with which the pianist believed he impregnated his touch, were explained away in the terms of a new principle, which, if it sufficed, would prove him to have been the deluded victim of a pedagogy steeped in superstition. Similar ideas obsessed many minds at the same time, and authors were surprised to discover that an epidemic of theoretical works founded on the same principle, had broken out. Each claimed the honour of priority, and indeed the discovery of the new principle was so precious to one protagonist, that he specifically ordered that any reference to it would only be allowed by special permission. He was evidently unaware that a rival author had already published the great secret !

Both positions could not however be indefinitely maintained. A way out of the impasse had to be sought, and those who had asserted that the aim and aspiration of the new Schools

did not suffice, must have discerned with a certain satisfaction the surrender of the new principle of released weight-touch on the belated discovery of an elementary truth in psychophysiology. This principle is now found to produce "cold" effects, and some mysterious so-called "artificial" or "artistic" factor must co-operate if pianoforte playing is to become a means of musical expression.

But this flight into pure transcendentalism hopelessly compromises the would-be rationalist. Faithful adherence to his creed should have brought Parnassus to his feet, but he eventually finds that he can only attain his object by a method long since familiar to the artist.

At the beginning the reform met with much success. Students trained in the German Schools, often mistaking finger-gymnastic for applied technique, realized the advantage of a correct gearing of their touch with the action of the piano. The new method also appeared to solve the problem of finger training by dispensing with it; and it was only later that this fallacy was exposed, when it became evident that a technique built on weight-touch, lacked vitality, and fingers remained weak and uncontrolled.

It must be admitted that the rigid technical training of certain German Schools made criticism

necessary. Limitations of the instrument were frequently ignored, and, paradoxically, those schools in aiming at more than the instrument could give, obtained less. A great service has therefore been rendered by destroying some of the shibboleths of false dogma and practice which had entwined these systems. But the mistake of the reactionaries was to assume that a rational method involved a new principle in the mechanism of touch and tone production, which, in practice, precluded that quality which is essential to individual expression.

It was thought by some who ultimately became conscious of these limitations, that expression could be applied like a coat of varnish to a finished painting. Unfortunately that rare quality, beauty, cannot be created by any such superficial aids. Its origin is so deep and the natural mechanism which operates in its expression so involved with the creative impulse, that to substitute another mechanism would inevitably render it artificial. But the innumerable weighty volumes on the new theories of technique had their effect on the present generation of students. The printed page now challenges the empirical methods of the artist-pedagogue. Temperament, which was once kept aflame and developed in the musical atmosphere which permeated the

older schools, now starves on a diet of theories and facts.

Nor has it ended here. A wholesale demand for these same theories and facts has now been created by certain examination authorities, and the English fetish of the certificate has had the immediate effect of sending students to the indicated works. Our young aspirants now talk and discuss their art in the terms of a new technology, which would be as wholly incomprehensible to a Paderewski or Busoni as it is to the lay mind.¹

¹The following is a "model answer" from a catechism published for examination purposes.

Q. Give a full description of how singing tone is obtained.

Ans. Singing tone is obtained when the Third Species in its weight-started form is used in conjunction with the Clinging Finger (and arm) attitude.

NOTE—The Third Species of Touch is a Triple Muscular Combination."

THE THEORIST'S DILEMMA

The consideration of the musical quality in touch has always introduced an element of mystery into the subject of pianoforte technique. The old schools were frankly romantic about it : the piano had no limitations that their musical aspirations could not surmount. On the other hand, modern pedagogues intent on rational methods, find themselves ultimately in the illogical position of applying in practice what is entirely opposed to their beliefs.

Take for instance the position of Mr. A. J. Johnstone that most vigorous champion of a sane pedagogy. After laying all the past and present superstitions on the subject of tone and touch, he states his creed as follows :—

“ I believe that given equal force and rapidity in depressing a key, no variations in the manner of its depression, in the modes of touch, can in any wise alter the quality of its tone.” Later he adds :—“ And if the student be desired to elicit from a piano key, by various curious devices of finger, hand, and arm movement. a ‘ broad ’ tone, a ‘ liquid ’ tone, a ‘ singing ’ tone, an ‘ entreating ’ a ‘ caressing ’ tone, a

'passionate' tone, or even a 'floating' tone, let him repeat the first article of his tone creed to his teacher, and then ask him respectfully to illustrate the doctrines of his more advanced creed by producing the required qualities of tone himself."

These tenets are stated and re-stated until any possible cause of misunderstanding seems to be eliminated. But when Mr. Johnstone contemplates expression in cantabile playing, force of habit compels him to capitulate and adopt traditional "superstitions." He explains in defiance of his creed, that the *essential lingering* sensation associated with this touch supplies the means whereby the player can express his subconscious desires:—"And when we now examine for a moment into the natural influence of this desire (subjective) of the player upon the manner of his action, we shall discover why it is that by general consent, pressure instead of percussion, a low wrist instead of a high wrist, a lingering pressure upon, and a gentle release of the key, instead of an instantaneous release and a high uplift of the finger, are considered to be essential elements of that branch of technique which is devoted to melody touch."

To this there can be no objection provided such subjective desire finds expression in the

music, that is, in the sounds so produced. If, on the other hand, the *raison d'être* of this method of melody-playing depends on the explanation offered by Mr. Johnstone, ought he not as a professed rationalist to suppress it? Subconscious desires may, and often do lead to all kinds of ineffectual mannerisms as, for instance, the tremolando which some pianists affect.

A pianoforte technique which is based on subconscious desires without relation to pianoforte mechanism, would be in constant danger of departing from a rational technique, *i.e.* a method of playing in which every effort and movement is effective. Had Mr. Johnstone completed his analysis of expression in touch, he would have found that it did not depend on the inadequate explanation he submits.

Mr. Matthay's position in relation to this subject is equally interesting. Like Mr. Johnstone, he also compromises when finally confronted with the need for self-expression. In the appendix to Part 3 of his work, "The Act of Touch," there is a reference to an extra something which is required for expressive playing, and in a later work this mysterious plus is dealt with under the strange title of "the non-automatic artificial legato element."

The two principles are explained as follows:—

(a) "In natural legato we have a mere cold pure legato, just legato and no more. It is obtained by compelling the fingers to connect each sound precisely to the next one through the light (but sufficient) weight left resting upon them by the arm for this purpose."

(b) "In artificial legato, on the contrary the finger and hand make the tenuto or legato independently of any release of arm weight. In this form of legato, each finger (helped by the hand) acts on its own—apart from the tone producing action, finger and hand press very slightly on the key beds."

It is claimed that "this comparatively non-automatic artificial legato element is indeed of great consequence musically—without it for instance, it is useless to attempt either Bach or Chopin."

It had been demonstrated with endless repetition that no effort subsequent to production of tone could possibly affect its quality or intensity. Yet here it is stated that a subtle lingering pressure on the key-beds is of great consequence musically. The "must-cease" principle, the so-called "natural legato," is now found to produce a mere pure cold legato, and a new principle has to be applied if the music of the great composers is to be interpreted. How

this subtle plus secures the musical effect is left to the imagination. It is obviously not the cause of tone inflexions, nor of the "overlapping effect" in *legatissimo*. By means of the released weight principle, a player can produce all these effects. Yet at this juncture, when the need for expression is considered, Mr. Matthay like Mr. Johnstone departs from his original position, and no longer seeks cause for effect.

Professor Breithaupt in the conclusion of his work "School of Weight-Touch," finding himself in a similar dilemma, also capitulates to the "artist." At the completion of this work which is based on the principle of a weighted arm, loose in all its movements, he adds:—"all that which corresponds to the idea of immobility, of fixation, and which practically only belongs to the artistic education of the professional pianist—properly speaking—has been omitted from this school * * * to play fixed is perhaps the same as to play with concentrated attention, it is midway between relaxation and rigidity, and produces the sensation of a fine muscular tension * * * The cantilena of the higher order, the fine gradations of tone, perfect ease and lightness, combined with artistic gracefulness, delicate rhythmic motions, can scarcely be realized technically and aesthetically by the aid of falling weight alone."

These belated references to the needs of the performer must perplex the student, and the explanations given only add to his confusion. It was assumed that the original "first principles" were based on the laws of physiology, and that the capacity of the piano was fully ascertained. Nothing it seemed remained, but for the student to begin his studies by the prescribed rules of the text books, when the ominous discovery was made that this so-called "natural" method is not for the artist; not by "natural" but by "artificial" or "artistic" means is the pianist enabled to play with warmth of touch and produce the desired musical effect.

An extraordinary point in Professor Breithaupt's confession is the assumption that the "artistic" technique belongs only to the higher training of the virtuoso. Must it be inferred that only these favoured individuals desire to concentrate and exercise aesthetic sensibilities? Surely the expression of musical feeling, the psychophysiological mechanism, is the same for the dilettante or child as for the artist-virtuoso.

This then is the dilemma of modern pedagogy. Experience, that assimilated product of experiment and reason, is made to appear irrational, and science discredited.

To play with expression is just as practical

a thing as to play with none. The artist must come to terms with cause and effect, and theories, by whatever name they are called, have finally to be tested in practice. It is this experience which eradicates all fallacies.

REAL DURATION

The new analysis of pianoforte touch stops short at the point at which it becomes a vital and musical expression. It cannot be claimed that "soul" is a degree in technical accomplishment or skill. The "cold" touch will not be transformed and become a means of passionate expression by the mere act of tightening the muscular mechanism, or by a gentle finger pressure on the mute key-beds. These acts may be effected without the slightest apprehension of aesthetic impulse. Further, if the lingering pressure supplied the magic means of expression, would it not follow *ipso facto* that all leggiero and staccato forms of touch are devoid of feeling?

The initial mistake of the new theorists is that they base their principles of touch on an

incomplete analysis. Starting with the assumption that the pianist need only play with the weight of hand or arm they have theoretically detached these parts of his mechanism. The result is that the player is limited in every direction ; in melody touch, in strength, lightness and clarity of tone, in fine control of nuance, in subtle blending of harmonies, in part-playing, where finger work alone tells, and, most important of all, in the vital matter of expression.

Non-comprehension of the aesthetics of pianoforte playing causes the confusion which often arises in pianoforte teaching, and before proceeding with the question of expression in touch, the ground must be cleared with an analysis of the psychological factors which work when playing or listening to pianoforte music.

The piano differs from other instruments in one most important aspect ; it does not give the control of the tone which some critics claim is essential to musical expression. Between the vital moments of sound there are the inter-spaces during which the player is cut off from his medium. This fact, and the equally obvious one that this discontinuity is confined to the instrument, and does not affect the musical consciousness of the player or listener, has caused many to ponder the apparent variations

between cause and effect. The explanation has been sought in quality of tone inflections, in tempo rubato, etc., but since there is no continuous dynamic progression, the solution is not to be found in these directions. It is evident that action and re-action are largely determined by factors other than those of a "non-musical" instrument; factors which elude an analysis limited to the plane of sensation.

Sound does not exist until vibration plays on the drum of the ear: does music exist except in the mind of the listener? If this be answered in the negative, it is no longer a question of piano versus other instruments, but rather of the reality of music itself. Combarieu, the eminent French theorist and musical historian, after traversing the ground already explored by Helmholtz, Spencer and Hanslick, states his belief that these scientists and critics merely dealt with the structure of music, and not with the idea or thought it expresses. After analysis of every knowable factor, he declares that though form and its content are inseparable, they are not identical; the soul of music must be sought elsewhere. He shews, with a consummate knowledge of his subject, that though the mind grapple in turn with every element of the context—form, sound, rhythm, harmony, melody—and

then contemplate the structure as a whole, the musical factor is still unexplained.

When we turn to the real abode of music, the mind of the listener, the subject assumes infinite complexity, for no two minds record identical impressions. The musician no longer plays on one, but on many instruments, or rather on many through the medium of one, and effects vary as the sounds awaken musical consciousness in the listeners.

So much or so little may happen in the mind : experiences vary : as sun and rain come alike to soil and sand, and as in the latter nature works no miracle, so good music and fine playing may find no response in the mind of some listeners. What then is this faculty—this silent factor which is essential to the creation of music ?

In an earlier publication " The Artist at the Piano " a chapter under the paradoxical title of " Silent Factors " afforded merriment to some critics of the " scientific " school, who made up in facetiousness what they lacked in understanding. One writer humorously suggested that the " silent factor " be tested by a pianist appearing in a darkened hall, and playing on a piano without strings ! Another explains that I founder in telepathy and mystery owing to my inability

to analyse the element of Rubato. Since, however, the silent factor works independently of time and tone variations, and is indeed almost equally potent in the music of a street organ, or child's musical box, we are contemplating different elements. The analyst, accustomed to think in terms of the concrete (sound being regarded by him as the substance of music) naturally resents the idea of the phenomena of silent factors. He assumes *a priori* that the context and the content are one, and in so doing, confuses illusion with reality.

The philosophy of Bergson throws a new light on this subject, and in the following paragraphs, a simile taken from his "Creative Evolution" and applied here to music, will prove of interest to those whose curiosity in the matter of the aesthetic of the art has hitherto been unsatisfied.

Music, as stated in the progression of notes and chords, is as unlike the music of our consciousness as the succession of separate snapshots on a cinema film are unlike the pictured life we recognise on the screen. Each note or chord is a separate sound unit of the composition, and the progression from one to another discloses upon analysis similar facts to those of the film. Notes and chords do not merge into each other; the interval is not bridged; the leading note

remains stationary ; the discord never resolves ; the evolving progression which makes music of these fixed sounds exists only in the mind of the listener. In pianoforte playing the artificiality of the means is only more obviously demonstrated than in the music of the violin or voice. Each note is literally hammered into our sense of hearing, and remains there fixed until displaced by succeeding notes ; yet who, when listening to a progression of chords, (the Pilgrim's Chorus from Tannhäuser, for example) is not conscious of the incessant change in the duration of each harmony ? On the striking of each new chord, musical desire projects itself from the world of sense, and a new harmony is born in the imagination. We thus get two simultaneous impressions ; the brain's record of the succession of static harmonies, and the more real one of the musical imagination.

When listening for the first time to a composition, the fact that we are often unable to anticipate the progression of chords accounts for our inability to appreciate it. The new consciousness which anticipation creates, explains why a discord which shocks our sensibilities when heard in a strange context may, with familiarity, create for us a new charm. The original harshness vanishes as the musical effect

of the progression is realized. Such is the conquest of the musical mind over purely physical phenomena.

This is equally true in relation to painting and other arts; sound being only a less obvious form of the substance we call matter. The duration of a tone or chord is to the ear what colour and line are to the eye; the only difference being that whereas in music the sensations of sound are fixed in a succession of moments, in the picture those of colour and line are simultaneous. In either case we shall only delude ourselves if we mistake this artificial duration for real duration which is created in the mind of the responsive artist. *Tempo rubato* and variations of tone intensities in music, or similarly the nuances of light and shade in painting, intensify, but do not create the aesthetic experience.

We may cite the futurist movement in painting as a notable example of how a misconception of this factor of real duration may affect creative art. Those interested in this modern cult will recall the famous manifesto issued by Signor Marinetti and his disciples some years ago. Every reader of that notorious creed must have remarked on the profundity of the intuitions of those art-anarchists about life, and the tragic

stupidity of their theories in depicting it. Life is movement, and change the only reality, but they attempt the impossible in trying to depict actual movement by concrete means. To present a multiple of successive impressions under the delusion that a multiplicity of positions is motion is only to reproduce the old fallacy of Achilles and the Tortoise. If by closing our eyes their intentions could penetrate our understanding we might experience the thrill which possibly animates their purpose, and be spared the pain which they unmercifully inflict on our senses.

There is still less excuse for the futurist composer. He has only to await the swing of the pendulum to experience any harmonic progression for which his soul craves. But he too, by throwing chords together in a meaningless jangle of confused sound, would annihilate time and live his emotions in one excruciating NOW.

CREATIVE IMAGINATION

Once the psychology of music is grasped, the problem of touch solves itself. The duality of music has its correspondence in technique. There is the mere note technique which suffices to play the instrument, and the musical technique which, co-operating with the former yet transcending it, expresses through the sense of touch the continuity of musical feeling, giving unity to phrase and form to composition.

When this feeling of continuity is lived in the interpretation of music, a new and significant factor operates in the mechanism of touch. It is rhythmic, but it is more than the mechanical movement of one beat to another ; it is the creative rhythm of the melodic and harmonic progression of a composition. Its effect is instantaneous on the technique of the re-creative artist. It quickens his sense of touch and puts him into immediate physical relation with his musical imagination. The resultant concentration (for concentration arises in the natural desire to express musical feeling, and is not itself a cause) gives to him the utmost sensibility of touch. It provides the

natural mechanism through which his musical personality finds expression. That the all-absorbed concentration of such artists as Paderewski or Cortot is a physical as well as a mental activity is obvious to all who have closely studied their methods. The intense passion and ecstasy of their art is inseparable from their technique. This psychological truth of the essential need of the correlation of body and mind in self-expression is testified to by all experience. To paraphrase Browning, "Nor soul helps body more than body soul." Madame Schumann when asked the secret of her pianissimos, surprised the enquirer by firmly grasping his hand remarking that in that strength lay her secret. Professor Leschetizky concurred in this and frequently remarked that uncontrolled fingers were as incapable of expressing fine feeling as they were uncertain in touch. It is undoubtedly the secret too of that fine muscular tension neither rigid nor relaxed which Herr Breithaupt admits as essential to aesthetic expression, which Mr. Matthay asserts as being "of great consequence musically" in his reference to "Artificial Legato," and which Mr. A. J. Johnstone attempts to define in his theories on the subconscious desires of the artist.

Mr. Richard Epstein the late esteemed pianist has also added his testimony in support of this

principle in his statement that "there must always be sufficient vitalizing power of the playing finger to safeguard the artistic substance of the tone" and as a practical teacher gives this as his reason for spending so much time in developing finger technique.

How this mechanism of the musical touch takes effect is no longer an insuperable problem. The film actor does not pose for each separate photograph; his action and expression are continuous, otherwise a mechanical picture would result. Similarly at the piano or any instrument, if the thread of continuity is not sensed, the creative faculty plays no part in a performance, with the inevitable result that the music, no matter how intellectually rendered, becomes a cold and artificial succession of sounds.

This is the artist's refutation of the devitalized-weight principle and the so-called "natural legato" as a means of musical performance.

Had the rationalists considered, the facts of the creative imagination and its subtle effect on technique through the sense of touch, their criticism of past methods would have been better informed, and they would have escaped the charge of inconsistency in their own.

Those whose experiences caused them to question the new principles will find in this

exposition of the musical touch the foundation of their belief.

ILLUSIONS, PAST AND PRESENT.

It will now be easy to trace the origin of certain ineffective practices which have become associated with pianoforte playing. Technique divides itself into two distinct functions; first, the adjustment and control of the strength of each finger (which expresses the musical quality of touch) and second, the blow itself (which determines the intensity of sound). These may operate simultaneously *i.e.* the resistance of each finger can be determined at the moment of playing, or the player can occupy the time of the interspaces between the blows to prepare a more accurate adjustment.

Most of the confused ideas of pedagogy originated in a miscomprehension of these functions, and many (including myself) were originally not free from the trammels of tradition in this respect. The old Schools often allowed the sense of continuity in expressive legato and

legatissimo playing and especially tenuto passages to express itself in a lingering pressure on the key beds, which practice was not only a waste of energy, but often resulted in a mis-timing of the blow, a fault which no fine adjustment of finger resistance could compensate. The more gentle pressure of the later Schools is only a less mischievous illusion. The adjustment which enables the player to gauge his tone with the maximum nicety of judgment, works equally effectively in the short crisp tone as in the long cantabile melody. The essential Tenuto is literally the player's "hold" and control of his fingers, and not a pressure on the depressed key. This is the only rational definition of the term as applied to pianoforte technique, a fact which every student should realize.

The practice of key-legato playing to connect the tones when pedal is used, is another habit due partly to the same illusion, and partly also to pedagogic heredity. The instruments which preceded the piano had no sustaining pedal, and the necessity of key-legato playing to connect the sounds created the habit of associating tone continuity with touch connection, and this practice has long survived the innovation of the pedal. The influence of organ playing has also a marked effect on pianoforte technique. Many

can remember the time when any emancipation from a method which had become meaningless would bring down the wrath of a master. Psychically no doubt these teachers heard what the eye saw. Even now one may often see a player of the older school hesitate before taking advantage of the pedal to free the hands from awkward positions involved in playing strict key-legato. Old editions of the classics, and even some modern are largely responsible for promoting and preserving these meaningless practices. The reader will no doubt recall many other instances where the finger gymnastics involved in making legato key connections (pedal being used) only tend to spoil the touch and make playing difficult.

At the same time it should be remembered that every movement in playing has its significance. It would be impossible for instance to make staccato movements of arms and hands, when pedal is used, and still preserve the character required in expressive legato phrases. For similar artistic reasons the sympathetic player will remain in touch with the melody, say, of Chopin's F Major Nocturne, or the chords of a slow movement of Beethoven and at a pause or the last chord of a cadence in order to preserve the character of the desired effect. Such sympathetic

style however need necessitate no slavery to the literal act of key-legato.

Other examples of fallacies due to pseudo-scientific reasoning were exposed in the "Artist at the Piano," but they need further insistence. It is still asserted that it is a wrong and futile act for the player to depress the key beyond its tone-producing position, in other words, it is thought that the force of the blow should be spent before the key comes into contact with the key-bed. This theory affords an excellent illustration of how the mind may be baffled by the logic of appearances. It is first demonstrated that tone is produced when the key is depressed about four-fifths of its full movement. If the key is pressed against the key-bed from this position the piano gives no response. The deduction is then made that all key-bed pressure must be a futile waste of effort and misdirected energy. The facts are true, but the deduction is false. Except in *leggiero* playing, it is as necessary for the pianist to come into active contact with the key-bed as for a cricketer or golfer to swing his bat or club past the point of contact with the ball, and the logic which proved such movement to be a waste of energy would supply similar "proof" in these parallel examples.

Considerably less tone will result if this theory

is put into practice, for it necessitates timing the tone production at a point about half the distance of key movement, and consequently only a shallow tone can be produced. Pressure against the key-bed is inevitable if a full blow is properly timed. The sweep of the intended movement is arrested by the interference of the key-bed where it is spent in a pressure equivalent in force to the speed of the blow.

By a similar process of reasoning it is also taught that the movement of hand or finger towards a key should not form a vital part of the touch: the reason given being that by taking the key in this way we necessarily jerk the hammer at the start, and consequently lose control of its subsequent movement. It is true that the hammer should always be driven from its bearing to the string and never knocked out of the control of touch; but against the theory that this can only be done from a prepared position—*i.e.* with the finger already in touch with the key, may be set the evidence of practice.

As the successful pianist is aware such movements are constantly directed through the keys without losing touch with the swing of the hammer. His secret is that of the dancer who alights from his leap almost without a sound, or it may lie in the prepared strength of finger

which overcomes key-resistance. But it is quite evident it cannot be successfully accomplished if the keys are struck with the weight of a thrown finger, or the unyielding dead weight of hand or arm. If this is attempted a jarring sensation will result from the blow against key surfaces.

Key-preparation is often necessary, especially in chord and melody playing, but it sets limits to tone-production both in degrees of intensity and quality of tone. It will cause passages to be blurred, especially in the bass, where the damper action is not instantaneous in stopping the sound. More important still, it will often act as a barrier to free rhythmic playing, and to that extent destroy spontaneity.

The common belief in the capacity of the piano to produce tone-colour contrasts by means of variation in the character of touch apart from intensity, introduces a problem which belongs to a different category. It does not necessarily incur an irrational technique.

I am aware that certain scientists have almost shattered this belief cherished among pianists. Steinhausen, Breithaupt and Mr. J. Swinburne agree that quality differences are not obtainable. On the other hand Professor G. H. Bryan after applying even more exhaustive tests, came to the conclusion that the question must still be

considered undecided. The problem would appear to resolve itself into this—does a variation in the rate of acceleration to a given speed of the hammer at the percussion moment, affect the tone? The Clutsam Cradle keyboard would appear to confirm the common belief in this respect. The physical difference in any case is obviously slight, and cannot afford a sufficient foundation for the experience which every artist admits. Von Bülow heard flutes, oboes and clarionets as he played Beethoven Sonatas, and in his edition has suggested orchestral colouring for certain phrases. D'Albert has done the same thing. The desired effect is probably a quality resulting from a combination of factors: relationship, tonal contrasts, and control of tone intensities, the latter combining actual tone quality differences if obtainable.

TEMPERAMENT

Once the factor of temperament is admitted, a new light is shed on the methods of pianoforte playing. Possibly no art reflects its presence so immediately. At the first touch its quality appears, preferences and antipathies are instantly formed, and the artist is considered in a new relation.

It is the root cause of all the controversies on this most vexed question of method. There is no greater delusion than the belief that science will reconcile these differences ; for as we have seen, even the rationalists compromised in practice, and followed the dictates of subconscious desires, rather than be tied to their theories. Nor has the recognition of the limitations of the tone of the piano had much effect on pedagogy, except to arouse interest in the aesthetic of the art. Quality variations in tone are denied, yet observe the characteristic differences in the effects, produced for example, by Paderewski and Pachmann. It is evident that in whatever form individuality has found expression, there science and art have had all their claims met.

Only a narrow pedagogy would attempt to explain that difference in the degree of sympathy with the instrument which these artists have respectively attained.

There is a quality in individual touch which transcends the medium of the piano. Expressed in movement, it is as elusive as its vehicle, and no analysis of effects which precludes continuity of expression will disclose its secret. These facts, however, need not start new theories. As shewn in the chapter on Real Duration they apply with equal force to other instruments, and other arts, except those of the stage in which movement and expression should be one.

It is somewhat extraordinary that curiosity on this question should have become exclusively associated with the piano. No criticism of painting, for instance, has ever confined itself to the quality of the paints used; that is a determined and fixed quantity, and can be bought in the same way as piano tone; but according as the artist uses his colour and controls his tone, another quality appears, and to the responsive artist that new quality is the dominating impression. It over-rules the sense impression as does harmony the individual notes of a chord. In that quality personality is expressed.

There is then this larger view of technique,

which modern pedagogy must insist upon if the art is to have any creative value. The popular belief that interpretation and technique can be considered separately no longer holds good. Technique represents all the artist has to give; whether he devotes himself merely to the making of pleasing tone, or is intent on conveying the musical thought, technique is the one vehicle for both. There is no magic which works outside its medium. The currency of the other interpretation has had its effect, and aspiration has proved a delusion in many instances where the goal seemed attained after many years devoted to finger gymnastics.

There can no longer be any justification for mere virtuosity. The invention of the modern player-piano has made the most astounding technical achievement a commonplace effect, but it still leaves unchallenged the interpretative powers of the human touch. Music begins not in notes, but in the living form which embodies its expression. What value then has a facile execution if there exists no musical impulse in the mind of the player? The quality which lends beauty in design is always to be preferred to that which is beautiful merely in itself. Every pianist must have a sense of rhythm and acquire a good touch, but mere technical facility is a

more prevalent possession than the creative faculty, while rhythm is more often a means of marking time than a musical portent.

The dual character of technique is evident; first the relation of the player's mechanism to the piano which is governed by the simplest laws in mechanics, and second, the relation of that mechanism to his personality which is as complex as his temperament.

Like the actor, the musician plays many parts (in Schumann's *Carnival* for instance he interprets all the characters) and each interpretation implies a new impersonation in the mechanism of touch.

It is the recognition of this essential need for variety in touch which explains why the great artist-teachers found no medium for their art in the circumscribed form of a method. Liszt, Rubinstein, Von Bülow, Madame Schumann and Leschetizky have left no stereotyped formulæ of their methods. Chopin tried and failed, and in some cases pupils have attempted what their teachers avoided on principle. Such contributions to pedagogy are of limited value, and are often misleading to those who search for the master's secret in the rules of a system which of necessity excludes the vital factor of individuality.

The great teacher is he who moulds the new conditions which each pupil presents (temperamental as well as physical) into complete relation with his art. Only by this means can individuality survive.

In the nature of things this vital quality in technique varies in the individual; mood and disposition play a big part, and account for the variability noticeable in the playing of many artists. It is not a question of technical accuracy; two performances may be equally perfect in this respect, the difference being entirely that of a fluctuating intensity in the musical feeling. There are performers who never make any demand on this creative quality in their playing. They are often talented, possessing a good ear, rhythmic sense and execution, but they never in a single phrase impart a personal touch. The function of this class is to imitate, and many possess the unconscious faculty of giving clever reproductions; they belong to the mimetic type of artist, as distinct from the creative. Children and prodigies usually belong to this category, but it is a significant fact that there is often a noticeable break in their development as they reach adolescence. In many cases self-consciousness intervenes and raises a barrier to the new feelings

which seek expression. It is possibly for this reason that many prodigies retire early from the concert platform, and only comparatively few maintain their youthful reputations. But he who emerges and survives as an artist, brings with him a new musical consciousness; and the fact that he has now something of his own to say, and is no longer only a medium through which other minds are expressed, affects the whole character of his playing. The art of the lithographer is now transformed into that of the creative artist, and technique is no longer a thing apart from himself, his whole being is concentrated on the content as well as on the context of the music he interprets.

There is a danger of stressing the importance of individuality to the extent of condoning every performance that is temperamentally expressed. Such expression is not a *sine qua non* of art, and performances must not be judged by this test alone. Personality is revealed in every emotion, and is more often commonplace than distinguished, its quality and dimension determine the artist. Neutral mimetic interpretations, and even those produced by mechanical means are often preferable to temperamental renderings in which the intellect plays no part.

None the less it is true, there can be no originality without temperament, it is the vitalizing force in art.

“ Then, in that instant, a beauty which had never been in the world came into the world ; a new thing was created, lived, died, having revealed itself to all those who were capable of receiving it. That thing was neither Beethoven nor Ysaye, it was made out of their meeting ; it was music, not abstract, but embodied in sound ; and just that miracle could never occur again, though others like it might be repeated for ever.”

ARTHUR SYMONS.

From “[Plays, Acting and Music.” 1903.

INTERPRETATION

Technique is ultimately seen to be involved in the meaning and function of art itself. As shewn in the chapter on Real Duration music does not exist in the context, it has to be created anew in the mind and art of the interpreter. Though its form is permanent the soul of music lives only in its reconception by the interpretative artist. It sometimes happens that a great player idealizes a composition, and imparts a quality which was not in the inspiration of the composer ; but the discrepancy is more often in the other direction. In great music this is necessarily the case, for its measure can only be comprehended by the artist who can fully respond to the mind of the composer. Also the capacity for sympathetic understanding is affected by the evolution of new musical forms. We live in the spirit of our day, and naturally respond to its expression in music ; new enthusiasms replace old and to some extent we become less conscious of the greatness of the masters of the past.

Familiarity is another potent cause of this change of attitude. The romance of one period tends to sentimentalism in another. The music of Mendelssohn for instance was a sincere emotion in the Victorian era, to-day a revival of this cult would be a sentimental affectation, and in view of the trend of modern music quite unthinkable.

There is therefore no absolute standard of music ; it is always relative to the degree of sympathy and understanding both of interpreter and listener. This should at once establish the fact that interpretative art is in itself a creative function. But it is by no means generally accepted, and the question has always been a subject of controversy. Some writers and critics take the view that it is an unpardonable intrusion on the part of the interpreter to come between composer (or dramatist in the case of a play) and the audience : they maintain that such intrusion tends to falsify the composer's or author's original meaning : they require that the player remain apart, impersonally directing the mechanism which creates the composer's or author's intentions in the minds of the audience. Further it is stated " living the emotion " will tend to hinder the mechanism of expression.

Another school of criticism as firmly insists

that interpretation is only possible when the spirit of a composition is lived in its expression, that is, in the player's technique.

Others reconcile these opposed theories in the classification of artists into objective and subjective categories, and accept either according as art (which is also classified) demands one or other principle of interpretation.

Yet another theory may be brought forward. It is possible that the cause of this diversity of opinion is created by divergent interpretations of the words "emotion" and "personality" as applied to art. It is frequently overlooked that the artist, in common with others of the human race, has a dual personality, the one expressed in actual and personal relationships, the other in the life of the imagination. They are related and react on each other, but that they are distinct and separate states of consciousness is evidenced in daily experience.

Outwardly people share in the common lot, yet how contrasted are their lives! Some in whom the imaginative qualities are highly developed, experience an emotion in apparently insignificant incidents, while others remain unmoved by the biggest events of life.

It is this gift of imagination and not time or distance which lends enchantment to scene and

circumstance. Imagination extends the horizon of reality, gives a new meaning to joy and sorrow and tints the commonplace with the glow of romance. To the artist it is the open sesame to a life of infinite possibilities, a life in which personality, disentangled from crude relationships and unnatural conventions finds unfettered expression. It is a more integral part of life than is commonly supposed. Aesthetic activity is to the adult what play is to the child, and equally essential to his complete development ; without it modern civilization would be dangerous.

The life of the imagination is as natural and real as that of actuality. It is not a world of make-believe and pretence ; it is an emotional experience, and sincerity and truth have their corresponding values there.

In art, however, the dividing line must not be crossed. If imagination fail through some cause of self-consciousness, when, as in a play, an actor moved beyond artistic restraint breaks the barrier between the two planes of experience, and intrudes his actual self, art ceases to be.

It is this intrusion that the purists rightly decry : but on the other hand there is inconsistency in the position which allows the audience every aesthetic emotion, and denies the need of this activity in the art which creates it. Not

even an artist can make bricks out of straw, but there are those who make the attempt with the result observed in the cold and colourless performances which critics usually describe as scholarly or intellectual by way of dismissing them.

This interpretation of the relation of an artist to his work is based on the belief that art is subjective. It rules out the arbitrary classification into subjective and objective. But while the principle behind all creative work is one, infinite differences of individual temperament give to art illimitable diversity.

In common with the general trend of art at this time, there is a reaction from the intensely subjective music of the nineteenth century. Composers seem to be deliberately avoiding intimate subject matter in their efforts to seek inspiration in the remote distances of their imagination. But it will be found as always, where creative and enduring art is in question, that its real subject matter is an emotional experience of the artist.

Such an experience crystallized in form becomes the inspiration of the interpretative artist. He will be drawn to this or that idiom according to his temperament and understanding, and to the degree that this relationship is complete

the purpose of his art is achieved.

In complete self-surrender lies the secret of self-expression; and in these moments of intimate and privileged fellowship a new beauty may be revealed.



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